

# Legislation aims to halt hate fliers in food packages

## Kohl, Baldwin co-sponsor bill

By Rich Vosepka

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — While generations of kids have opened breakfast cereal boxes to find toys and trinkets, some today are finding things "Tony the Tiger" and "Cap'n Crunch" never intended: racist and anti-Semitic hate literature.

Now, bills proposed in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, co-sponsored by Wisconsin Democrats, would make it a crime to put written material inside cereal boxes, frozen pizzas and other grocery packages without the manufacturer or retailer's permission.

Kraft Foods Inc. has heard at least 80 reports of hate literature showing up inside its food boxes since 1997, according to a statement from Sen. Orrin Hatch, a bill sponsor.

Leaflets attacking blacks, praising the Holocaust and encouraging violence against immigrants have all turned up — messages international food makers don't want associated with their products, said Michelle Trowbridge, communications vice president for American Frozen Foods, an industry group.

Manufacturers have investigated their operations and found that the leaflets are not getting into the boxes at the factory or during distribution, she said.

Currently, there is nothing illegal about putting pamphlets under cereal box flaps or taping them to frozen pizzas, said Lynn Becker, a spokeswoman for Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., another of the bill's sponsors. Laws against product tampering deal only with altering or poisoning the food itself.

Because the measure bans the act of tampering with someone else's property, rather than the specific messages themselves, it should not raise free speech concerns, said Mike Gill, a legislative spokesman for American Frozen Foods.

A House version of the bill came before the Crime Subcommittee on Thursday. Bill co-sponsor Rep. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, said the law was necessary because the FBI and Food and Drug Administra-

tion have said they don't have statutory authority to prosecute these acts.

"It's limited to a few isolated incidents a year, but it's a loophole we'd like to see closed," said Pete Cleary, spokesman for the Grocery Manufacturers of America. "We want to be able to protect our brands."

California and New Jersey have already passed laws of their own after hate literature complaints surfaced in those states.

In Utah, a police detective who tracks hate crimes said he hasn't seen any of the grocery box fliers. But hate literature is nothing new.

"This is the way they've gone about spreading their message," said detective Isi Tausinga of the Salt Lake Police Department. When residents complain about racist handouts, Tausinga tells people to throw the stuff away; he normally can't make a criminal case.

One of the groups most active here is called the National Alliance, a white-supremacist organization based in West Virginia. Some of its printed handouts, which decry interracial couples on television, alleged Jewish control of Hollywood movies and perceived Communist brainwashing in public schools, showed up in suburban Salt Lake City last weekend.

Handing out these fliers is protected free speech, Tausinga said.

But National Alliance literature has inspired some high-profile hate crimes, said John Bernstein, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League in San Francisco.

Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh may have taken his inspiration from "The Turner Diaries," a white supremacist missive written by National Alliance founder William L. Pierce.

And the white supremacists who killed a black man by dragging him behind a pickup in Jasper, Texas, also have ties to the writings of Pierce, Bernstein said.

The group now owns Resistance Records, a chief producer of neo-Nazi rock music, he said.